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You're Never Too Old to Be Engaged!

Active Engagement Keeps Seniors Involved, Healthy

Dr. Russell Clark of Orem, Utah leads a fairly active life: he walks four or five miles a day, occasionally drives to Las Vegas to check on the management of his investment property, attends movies and the opera, and volunteers his time helping others.

What makes him rather unusual is that he does all this at the age of 103.

In fact, in the twenty years since he officially “retired” from his career as a surgeon at the tender age of 83, Clark has been involved in a broad variety of pursuits. Good genes? Yes, he concedes. His “kid sister” is 97, while an aunt made it to 106, and an uncle lived to 107. But in addition to good genes, Clark credits having things to do and goals to accomplish as his keys to keeping in the pink—as well as exercising and maintaining a good diet.

Sign of the Times?

Dr. Clark was recently recognized as “America’s Oldest Worker” by Experience Works, a non-profit organization offering training, employment, and community service opportunities for mature workers. His story is a great source of inspiration for everyone approaching what used to be called “retirement age.” And he is not alone—there is a rapidly growing army of older Americans who are pursuing second or third careers, volunteering their time in their communities, and getting involved in other activities in numbers that can’t be ignored.

A 2002 survey by Peter D. Hart Research Associates found that more than half (59 percent) of individuals 50 and older see retirement as “a time to be active and involved, to start new activities, and to set new goals.” Those who plan to work in their retirement cite the desire to stay active and productive, rather than economic necessity, as the reason.

A Wide Range of Options

Research clearly shows that actively engaged individuals are more likely to remain mentally and physically stimulated and, as a result, enjoy a better quality of life. The MacArthur Foundation’s “Study of Aging in America” identified engaging in life as a key component to successful aging. Remaining actively engaged can take many forms, from maintaining close relationships with family and friends, to staying involved in productive activities such as paid and volunteer work, taking a class, joining a book club and more.

When asked why he likes volunteering, Frank is quick to mention the many interesting new friends and acquaintances he’s made — including a master clock repairman blind since birth and an elderly woman who was born the day the Titanic sank in 1912. A 72-year old retiree living in Windsor, Connecticut, Frank enjoys volunteering his time in a number of ways, from delivering Meals on Wheels with his wife, Effie, to serving as a volunteer teacher in his town’s adult education program.



In addition to meeting new people, Frank says these experiences also give him motivation to explore some old interests and develop fresh perspectives — such as brushing up for the classes in philosophy and checkers he teaches as a volunteer. And, he adds with a laugh, it gets him out of the house.

By pursuing old interests, developing new ones, volunteering, and keeping their minds open to new experiences and opportunities, millions of Americans are helping themselves and their communities.

As the nation celebrates Older Americans Month this May, you can learn more about this issue and other programs by visiting the U.S. Administration on Aging website at www.aoa.gov. This year's theme—"Aging Well, Living Well"—highlights the many ways Americans are getting more from life as they age. For information about what resources are available locally, contact the Eldercare Locator at 1-800-677-1116 or visit www.eldercare.gov.

